DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 162 297 CS 004 508

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TITLE Integrating Pre-Reading Skills into the Kindergarten Curriculum.
PUB DATE May 78
NOTE 12p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the International Reading Association (23rd, Houston, Texas, May 1-5, 1978)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Beginning Reading; *Cognitive Development; *Kindergarten; Perceptual Development; *Prereading Experience; Primary Education; *Reading Readiness; *Teaching Techniques
IDENTIFIERS *Reading Attitudes

ABSTRACT

One approach to preparing kindergarten children for beginning reading combines a meaningful print environment with active student involvement in the learning process. The environment of the classroom from the beginning exposes children to meaningful printed words and symbols. Children use name tags not only for identification but also as a way for the teacher to take attendance through the year. From daily calendar use, children learn awareness of time word boundaries, left-to-right sequence, number concepts, sound-syllable relationships, and sight-word identification. Job charts, activity charts, and labeling are other ways of making children aware of printed meaning and helping them develop sight-word identification skills. Nursery rhymes, songs, and stories read aloud by the instructor are also used to enhance reading skill development. The overall purpose of this program is to develop positive attitudes toward reading as well as to develop cognitive skills. (TJ)

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INTEGRATING PRE-READING SKILLS INTO THE KINDERGARTEN CURRICULUM

Presented to

International Reading Association
Twenty-third Annual Convention
May 1-5, 1978
Houston, Texas

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INTEGRATING PRE-READING SKILLS INTO THE KINDERGARTEN CURRICULUM

In many of our states the advent of public school kindergarten programs is of recent vintage. Confusion has resulted relevant to the manner of preparing a child for the first grade reading experience. Kindergarten teachers are in need of help and guidance in determining the place of reading and the methods and techniques to be used in the kindergarten curriculum (Ching, 1970). Some kindergarten programs have attempted to present a watered-down version of the first grade experience. Others have resorted to the workbooks and worksheets of the upper grades to teach young children pre-reading and beginning reading skills in a highly structured manner. Research supports the conclusion that formal reading programs at the kindergarten level can promote development of pre-reading and reading skills (Schoephoerster, Barnhart, and Loomer, 1966). However, experimental studies also indicate that while reading achievement may be fostered through utilization of formal reading instruction, that pupil attitudes toward reading and school suffer. School is less attractive to children in formal reading programs than to those in informal or readiness instruction programs (Kelley and Chen, 1967).

The purpose of this paper is to present a functional approach to the integration of pre-reading and reading skills into the kindergarten curriculum. The program which is described in this paper is the training method which is used at the University of Arkansas demonstration school, the University Kindergarten. This functional approach to reading does not rely on the use of commercial readiness programs which tend not to discriminate among beginning readiness and experiencial levels. This approach to beginning reading is based on the nature of the five-year-

old child, the child's need for activity and involvement in the learning process. In this kindergarten program, through its subtle though structured approach, the child's environment is saturated with experiences that are condusive to reading and skill development. Classroom experiences are designed to foster the need for reading.

Environment

From the very first day in the University of Arkansas kindergarten, children are exposed to meaningful printed words and symbols. As in many school classrooms name tags are worn for the first few days. However, the name tags are not used merely for student identification by the instructor; the name tags and later kinesthetic salt name cards are a basis for skill development. Configuration, letter recognition, counting, and sound-syllable relationship skills are developed using the ego-involved name tags. Children's names in written form are also used to identify coat cubbies and classroom job responsibilities. Each day, as children enter the classroom, they stop at the attendance chart and "sign in" by placing their name cards in a pocket chart. The child must learn to recognize this name card from all others by using initial letter and configuration clues. The teacher helps the child with this task until he/she is able to do it alone. Since reporting the day's attendance at circle time is also a classroom job, children learn to read the names of the other children in the class, as well as their own, during the year.

Circle time or the conversation and planning period include daily routines that are designed to assist development of concepts, language, and reading skills. Large, teacher-made calendars are designed for each month. Children take turns, on a rotating basis, reporting the current month, day, date, and saying for the month. All children join in this

activity which stresses awareness of time and also word boundaries, left to right sequence, number concepts, sound-syllable relationships, and sight word identification. Calendar activities are also related to holidays, birthdays, planning field trips, weather, and seasons.

Another daily routine which is part of circle time, is reading the job chart to ascertain each child's classroom responsibility. Job charts are designed to use print and pictures to convey meaning. At the start of the year, the chart is reviewed orally daily by the teacher with the children. Gradually, children are encouraged to identify their jobs or the jobs of others, and the use of picture clues is faded out.

Center activity charts are also a part of the classroom routine and environment to make print meaningful. During a daily activity period children are free to choose a work center. Activity centers of available choices vary both in kind and instructional materials during the year. The center charts which list the activities and control the number of children in a center are also changed during the year. At the start of the program center charts utilize pictures, words, and color coding to assist the child in identifying possible activity choices. Spring-type clothes pins are color-coded to correspond to each center. A child selects a center, clips on to his/her collar a corresponding pin, and proceeds to the center. All centers are labeled with color-coding, pictures, and words. Gradually, the pictures and eventually the color coding are faded out of the center charts. The child begins relating meaning to the printed word. Those children who have not yet learned the necessary words, find classmates helpful in identifying selections.

Within the classroom environment opportunities for the use of labeling and print abound. However, the labeling is kept functional. Labeling

without regard for need or function may result in inattention to the stimuli by the children. Children may ignore excessive labels just as adults ignore over abundant advertising; excessive print may fail to gain attention in the midst of a rich environment. Labeling is commonly used to caption bulletin boards and displays. Labels utilize lower case letters, careful spacing, and good manuscript models. Bulletin board captions and other labels are suggested by children or teachers. Teachers guide the children's attention to make them aware of the meaning of written captions.

Children enjoy discovering the meaning in printed words. In the University of Arkansas Kindergarten, chalkboards are used to communicate messages to the children. Special plans for the day are simply noted on the chalkboard, i.e. "Field trip to the greenhouse today." The daily snack time menu is also printed on the board along with committee assignments. Children also display particular interest in the messages involving their names or the snack for the day.

Beginning kindergarteners generally arrive at school with an experiencial backgroun in Mother Goose nursery rhymes. These memorized rhymes provide a good basis for relating the print and developing pre-reading skills. In the University Kindergarten large teacher-made nursery rhyme posters are used in reciting the rhymes and in teaching the nursery rhyme songs. As the instructor teaches the song, he/she points to the words (using a hand to underline or call attention to the words) and occasionally frames a word with his/her hands. A child is asked to repeat the word and to find other places on the card where the word is printed. Poster-size nursery rhyme verses are later placed where children can use them in "teaching" each other. Eventually the charts become part of the

meaningful print which is in the classroom environment.

As skills improve and interest is established in reading-related activities, letter cards with pictures displaying items whose names begin with the same phoneme are introduced to the program. Children are encouraged to orally name concrete items such as toy fruits, animals, etc. A game is made of sorting objects into classification boxes on the basis of initial consonant sound. Language development and usage are enchanced by having children describe an object which is out of sight to the class.

Weekly trips to the library to select books for the classroom library provide children with opportunities to enjoy books and reading related experiences. Self-selected books provide the motivation for children to learn book titles and develop orientation to books skills.

Literature

The utilization of children's literature is of major importance in the University of Arkansas demonstration program. Stories, poetry and other forms of literature, which are designed for children's enjoyment, are utilized to motivate and involve children in the learning process. Stories read aloud to children have been demonstrated to foster a number of skills. The technique used in presenting a book to children may also assist reading and book-related concept development. The following procedure is used in the University Kindergarten to enhance reading skill development. If a book's title is in large print on the book's cover, the teacher displays the cover and reads the title slowly while pointing to (or underlining by hand) each word. This technique is also used with the author's or illustrator's printed names if they appear. As the teacher turns through the end papers and to the title page, he/she again uses this

technique in reading the title, author's and illustrator's names. The teacher may pause or hesitate slightly in reading a part of the title, to encourage children to pronounce the next word. Thus, even the common act of story reading is refined to enhance reading skill development in a seemingly natural manner.

Music

Music and rhythm activities form an integral part of the child's day in the University of Arkansas Kindergarten. Singing and teaching songs lend themselves well to teaching pre-reading and reading skills. Many of the songs taught in the University Kindergarten are written on poster-size charts which display verses with rebus insertions. The rebus or picture is used to cue the child to the song sequence. Instructors teach the songs by saying the words as they point to the printed words on the chart. Techniques similar to those discussed in conjunction with the nursery rhyme charts are used. Songs which lend themselves to this strategy are those which involve repetition, alliteration, short words, and noun pictures. "Bingo" is a good example of a song for use on a teaching chart. Again, song charts should be made available to children for their use during activity periods.

Cooking

Cooking and food preparation activities are favored experiences by young children. Since the University Kindergarten program is a half day experience, a mid-morning snack which is prepared by children under the supervision of the teacher is part of the daily routine. Food and cooking experiences are excellent motivators for language development and reading. A teacher-made recipe book, especially designed for the kindergarten, pro-

vides opportunities for reading instruction and learning. The cook book is designed to utilize both pictures and words in conveying recipe directions and ingredients needed for food preparation. A small group of children who are snack helpers for the day read the recipes and prepare the snack with teacher help. Some food experiences which are applicable to large group instruction are also carried out on occasions. For large group instruction, poster-size charts are used rather than the table top model recipe book.

Language Experience

Field trips or meeting resource people afford children the special experiences which may be used as the basis for writing language experience stories. Thank you notes or trip reports which are dictated by children and written down by the teacher are another teacher-made and child-illustrated highly-motivating, material for teaching pre-reading and reading skills. Charts of these language experience stories are reviewed with the children and later placed to become a part of the meaningful print environment. Copies of stories are a source of material that is included in newsletters to parents.

Assessment

Many of the activities mentioned in this paper are easily adapted for large or small group use. Of course, if the teacher is to provide for the special needs of each child, an evaluation of the child's developmental and skill acquisition level is needed.

Every instructional program requires some type of student assessment prior to beginning instruction. The assessment may be informal, based on teacher observations or teacher-pupil interaction, or it may be more

structured. The University of Arkansas Kindergarten program relies on both formal and informal assessment of skills. From the first day of the school year until the last teacher observations of each child's behavior and skill attainment are written in anecdotal form to become a part of the child's progress record. During the first week of school, events are recorded daily in the child's record. After that time, a weekly note is made. Unusual events or insights are recorded when they occur.

Along with the anecdotal records, the Kindergarten Student assessment, a formal instrument for evaluating children's skill attainment in various areas, both cognitive and psych-motor in nature, is also utilized. The Kindergarten Student Assessment (Sullivan, 1976) is an instrument which evaluates verbal and nonverbal skills. It is administered individually to each child after rapport between teacher and pupil has been established. The evaluation results are used in structuring the learning experiences of the class and the individual child. End of the term reassessment is also conducted to view the child's development. These assessment results are also utilized to inform parents of children's progress and to recommend home-based reinforcing experiences. A bi-weekly newsletter is also distributed to parents to keep them apprised of on-going activities and to suggest language and concept development activities.

Individualization

A well designed and implimented instructional program which takes into account individual differences and needs broadens the range of achievement among children. In the University of Arkansas Kindergarten program, individualized instruction is provided during the activity period. Activities such as art or woodworking provide opportunities for children to

express their thoughts orally, and for the teacher to record them in print. The child's written words are used to provide individualizing experiences. For children who are not ready for this type experience, other activities are provided.

Summary

Preparing a child for the beginning reading experience may be conducted in a variety of ways using many types of instructional materials. The approach utilized at the University of Arkansas Kindergarten combines a meaningful print environment with active student involvement in the learning process. The overall purpose of this approach is to produce positive attitudes toward reading as well as to develop cognitive skills.

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